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May 30, 1966

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH THE PRESIDENT

I saw the President about 6.30 Friday evening, May 27. Walt Rostow came in with me as he was waiting with the Mexican Ambassador for the next appointment.

The President said, "I want you to tell the Russians that I want peace. You know best how to talk to them."

He then turned to the subject of the Great Society, and spoke at length about what he wanted to do, underlining what Luci had been doing. She had had trouble with her eyes in reading. Since she had been cured, she had a special interest in the children in the Head Start program and had stimulated eye examinations. He seemed interested when I told him briefly of Kitty's experiences last summer.

He referred to the party for Luci and the Diplomatic Corps, saying that Ladybyrd will only permit two people to give Luci parties -- "Tom and Mary Clark, the oldest of friends, and you. She thinks a lot of you."

I didn't try to get any clearer definition of my instructions as I was afraid that Rostow would try to limit my discussions with Kosygin. We had had a few minutes talk before seeing the President, and in an almost maniacal tone he said, "The President is going to stick it out! The bombing will escalate. He will agree to take out the oil storage." I asked, "What next?" He replied, "Haiphong harbor." I said, "What about the Soviets?" He said, "Oh, they won't do anything." I commented that no one could tell just what step would compel Soviet action. As bombing was marginal, I would stay well within that point. President Kennedy had looked down the nuclear barrel and Khruschev had pulled away. I expressed the opinion that this wasn't a situation in which we wanted to get to that point again. Walt said, "Oh, yes

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"Oh, yes, we will probably have to get there because it is only in extreme crises that some settlement will come."

The above confirmed my worst fears of Rostow's reckless and mistaken attitude on bombing escalation.

W. Averell Harriman

WAH/hbs